

THE CONQUEST of CANAAN

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CHAPTER V.

THE Canaan Daily Tocsin of the following morning ventured the assertion upon its front page that "the scene at the Pike mansion was one of unalloyed festivity, music and mirth; a fairy bower of airy figures waiting here and there to the throbbing strains; a veritable temple of Terpsichore, shining forth with a myriad of lights, which, together with the generous profusion of floral decorations and the mingled delights afforded by Minds' orchestra of Indianapolis and Caterer Jones of Chicago, was in all likelihood never heretofore surpassed in elegance in our city. Only one incident," the Tocsin remarked, "marred on otherwise perfect occasion, and out of regard for the culprit's family connections, which are prominent in our social world, we withhold his name. Suffice it to say that through the vigilance of Mr. Norbert Filcroft, grandson of Colonel A. A. Filcroft, who proved himself a thorough Leeco (the celebrated French detective), the rascal was seized and recognized. Mr. Filcroft, having discovered him in hiding, had a cordon of waiters drawn up around his hiding place, which was the charmingly decorated side piazza of the Pike mansion, and sent for Judge Pike, who came upon the intruder by surprise. He evaded the judge's indignation, but received a well merited blow over the head from a poker which the judge had concealed about his person while pretending to approach the hiding place casually. Attracted to the scene by the cries of Mr. Filcroft, who, standing behind Judge Pike, accidentally received a blow from the same weapon, all the guests of the evening sprang to view the scene, only to behold the culprit leap through a crevice between the strips of canvas which inclosed the piazza. He was seized by the colored coachman of the mansion, Sam Warden, and immediately pounced upon by the cordon of Caterer Jones' dusky assistants from Chicago, who were in ambush outside. Unfortunately after a brief struggle he managed to trip Warden and, the others stumbling upon the prostrate body of the latter, to make his escape in the darkness."

Not quite a mile above the northernmost of the factories on the water front there projected into the river near the end of the crescent bend above the town a long pier, relic of steamboat days, rotting now and many years fallen from its maritime uses. About midway of its length stood a huge, crazy shed, long ago utilized as a freight storeroom. This had been patched and propped, and a dangerous looking veranda attached to it, overhanging the water. Above the doorway was placed a sign whereon might be read the words, "Beaver Beach, Mike's Place." The shore end of the pier was so ruinous that passage was offered by a single row of planks, which presented an appearance so temporary as well as insecure that one might have guessed their office to be something in the nature of a drawbridge. From these a narrow path ran through a marsh left by the receding river to a country road of desolate appearance. Here there was a rough inclosure or corral, with some tumble-down sheds which afforded shelter on the night of Joseph Louden's disgrace for a number of shaggy teams attached to those decrepit and musty vehicles known picturesquely and accurately as night hawks.

By 3 o'clock joy at Mike's place had become beyond question unconfined, and the tokens of it were audible for a long distance in all directions. If, however, there is no sound where no ear hears, silence rested upon the countryside until an hour later. Then a lonely figure came shivering from the direction of the town not by the road, but slinking through the snow upon the frozen river. It came slowly, as though very tired, and cautiously, too, often turning its head to look behind. Finally it reached the pier and stopped as if to listen.

Within the house above a piano of evil life was being beaten to death for its sins and clamoring its last cries horribly. The old shed rattled in every part with the thud of many heavy feet and trembled with the shock of noise, an incessant roar of men's voices, punctuated with women's screams. Then the riot quieted somewhat. There was a clapping of hands, and a violin began to squeak measures intended to be oriental. The next moment the listener scrambled up one of the rotting planks and stood upon the veranda. A shaft of red light through a broken shutter struck across the figure above the shoulders, revealing a bloody handkerchief clutched about the head and beneath it the face of Joe Louden.

Joe opened the door and went in. All of the merry company (who were able) turned sharply toward the door as it opened. One or two nearest the door asked the boy, without great curiosity, what had happened to his head. He merely shook it faintly in reply and

crossed the room to an open hallway beyond. At the end of this he came to a frowzy bedroom, the door of which stood ajar. Seated at a deal table and working by a dim lamp with a broken chimney, a close cropped, red bearded, red haired man in his shirt sleeves was jabbing gloomily at a column of figures scrawled in a dirty ledger. He looked up as Joe appeared in the doorway, and his eyes showed a slight surprise.

"I never thought ye had the temper to git somebody to split yer head," said he. "Where'd ye collect it?"

He unwound the handkerchief and removed it from Joe's head gently. "Whee!" he cried as a long gash was exposed over the forehead. "I hope ye left a mark somewhere to pay a little on the score of this!"

Joe chuckled and dropped dizzily back upon the pillow. "There was another who got something like it," he gasped feebly, "and, oh, Mike, I wish you could have heard him going on! Perhaps you did. It was only three miles from here."

"Nothing I'd liked better," said the other, bringing a basin of clear water from a stand in the corner. "It's a beautiful thing to hear a man's holler when he gets a grand one like ye're wearing tonight."

He bathed the wound gently and, hurrying from the room, returned immediately with a small jug of vinegar. Wetting a rag with this tender fluid, he applied it to Joe's head, speaking soothingly the while.

"Nothing in the world like a bit of good cider vinegar to keep off the fever!" It may seem a trifle scratchy for the moment, but it assassinates the blood poison. There ye go! It's the fine thing fer ye, Joe. What are ye squirming about?"

"I'm only enjoying it," the boy answered, writhing as the vinegar worked into the gash. "Don't you mind my laughing to myself?"

"Ye're a good one, Joe!" said the other, continuing his ministrations. "I 'sist, after all, ye felt like makin' me known to what's the trouble. There's some of us would be glad to take it up fer ye, and—"

"No, no; it's all right. I was somewhere I had no business to be, and I got caught."

"Who caught ye?" "First some nice white people"—Joe smiled his distorted smile—"and then a low down black man helped me to get away as soon as he saw who it was. He's a friend of mine, and he fell down and tripped up the pursuit."

"I always knew ye'd git into large trouble some day." The red bearded man tore a strip from an old towel and began to bandage the boy's head with an accustomed hand. "Ye taste fer excitement has been growin' on ye every minute of the four years I've known ye."

"I've got \$7," Joe said, without replying to Mike, "and I'll leave the clothes I've got on. Can you fix me up with something different?"

"I'll have the things fer ye, and I'll let ye know I have no use fer \$7," returned the red bearded man crossly.

"What are ye suttin' fer?" "I'm thinking of the poor fellow that got the mate to this," said Joe, touching the bandage. "I can't help crying when I think they may have used vinegar on his head too."

"Git to sleep if ye can!" exclaimed the Samaritan as a hideous burst of noise came from the dance room, where some one seemed to be breaking a chair upon an acquaintance. "I'll go out and regulate the boys a bit." He turned down the lamp, fumbled in his hip pocket and went to the door.

CHAPTER VI.

THE day broke with a scream of wind out of the prairies and such cloudbursts of snow that Joe could see neither bank of the river as he made his way down the big bend of ice. The wind struck so bitterly that now and then he stopped and, panting and gasping, leaned his weight against it. The snow on the ground was caught up and flew like sea spume in a hurricane; it swirled about him, joining the flakes in the air, so that it seemed to be snowing from the ground upward as much as from the sky downward. Pierce as it was, hard as it was to fight through, snow from the earth, snow from the sky, Joe was grateful for it, feeling that it veiled him, making him safer, though he trusted somewhat the change of costume he had effected at Beaver Beach. A rough workman's cap was pulled down over his ears and eyebrows; a knitted comforter was wound about the lower part of his face; under a ragged overcoat he wore blue overalls and rubber boots, and in one of his red mittened hands he swung a tin dinner bucket.

He bent his body against the wind and went on, still keeping to the back ways, until he came to the alley which passed behind his own home, where, however, he paused only for a moment to make a quick survey of the premises. A glance satisfied him; he

ran to the next fence, hoisted himself wearily over it and dropped into Roger Tabor's back yard.

The place seemed empty, and he was on the point of going away when he heard the click of the front gate and saw Ariel coming toward him. At the sound of the gate he had crouched close against the side of the house, but she saw him at once.

She stopped abruptly and, throwing the waterproof back from her head, looked at him through the driven fog of snow. One of her hands was stretched toward him involuntarily, and it was in that attitude that he long remembered her—she looked an Uddine of the snow.

Suddenly she ran to him, still keeping her hand outstretched until it touched his own.

"How did you know me?" he said.

"Know you?" was all the answer she made to that question. "Come into the house. I've got some coffee on the stove for you. I've been up and down the street waiting for you ever since it began to get light. There's no one here."

She led him to the front door, where he stamped and shook himself. He was snow from head to foot.

She wasted no time in getting him to the kitchen, where, when she had removed his overcoat, she placed him in a chair, unwound the comforter and, as carefully as a nurse, lifted the cap from his injured head. When the strip of towel was disclosed, she stood quite still for a moment, with the cap in her hand. Then, with a broken little cry, she stooped and kissed a lock of his hair which escaped, discolored, beneath the bandage.

"Stop that!" he commanded, horribly embarrassed.



He looked up as Joe appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, Joe," she cried, "I knew! I knew it was there, but to see it! And it's my fault for leaving you. I had to go or I wouldn't have—I—"

"Where'd you hear about it?" he asked shortly.

"I haven't been to bed," she answered. "Grandfather and I were up all night at Uncle Jonas', and Colonel Filcroft came about 2 o'clock, and he told us."

"Did he tell you about Norbert?"

"Yes—a great deal." She poured coffee into a cup from a pot on the stove, brought it to him, then, placing some thin slices of bread upon a gridiron, began to toast them over the hot coals.

"The colonel said that Norbert thought he wouldn't get well," she concluded, "and Mr. Arp said Norbert was the kind that never die, and they had quite an argument."

"What were you doing at Jonas Tabor's?" asked Joe, drinking his coffee with a brightening eye.

"We were sent for," she answered. "What for?"

She toasted the bread attentively without replying, and when she decided that it was brown enough piled it on a warm plate. This she brought to him and, kneeling in front of him, her elbow on his knee, offered for his consideration, looking steadfastly up at his eyes. He began to eat ravenously.

"What for?" he repeated. "I didn't suppose Jonas would let you come in his house. Was he sick?"

"Joe," she said quietly, disregarding his questions—"Joe, have you got to run away?"

"Yes, I've got to," he answered. "Would you have to go to prison if you stayed?" She asked this with a breathless tenseness.

"I'm not going to beg father to help me out," he said determinedly. "He said he wouldn't, and he'll be spared the chance. He won't mind that; nobody will care! Nobody! What does anybody care what I do?"

"Now you're thinking of Mamie!" she cried. "I can always tell. Whenever you don't talk naturally you're thinking of her!"

He poured down the last of the coffee, growing red to the tips of his ears. "Ariel," he said, "if I ever come back—"

"Wait," she interrupted. "Would you have to go to prison right away if they caught you?"

"Oh, it isn't that," he laughed sadly. "But I'm going to clear out. I'm not going to take any chances. I want to see other parts of the world, other kinds of people. I might have gone, anyhow, soon, even if it hadn't been for last night. Don't you ever feel that way?"

"You know I do," she said. "I've told you—how often! But, Joe, Joe, you haven't any money! You've got to have money to live!"

"You needn't worry about that," returned the master of \$7 genially. "I've saved enough to take care of me for a long time."

"Joe, please! I know it isn't so. If you could wait just a little while—only a few weeks—only a few, Joe!"

"What for?"

"I could let you have all you want. It would be such a beautiful thing for me, Joe. Oh, I know how you'd feel. You wouldn't even let me give you that dollar I found in the street last year, but this would be only lending it to you, and you could pay me back some time!"

"Ariel!" he exclaimed and, setting his empty cup upon the floor, took her by the shoulders and shook her till the empty plate which had held the toast dropped from her hand and broke into fragments. "You've been reading the 'Arabian Nights'!"

"No, no!" she cried vehemently. "Grandfather would give me anything. He'll give me all the money I ask for."

"Money?" said Joe. "Which of us is wandering? Money? Roger Tabor give you money?"

"Not for awhile. A great many things have to be settled first."

"What things?"

"Joe," she asked earnestly, "do you think it's bad of me not to feel things I ought to feel?"

"No."

"Then I'm glad," she said, and something in the way she spoke made him start with pain, remembering the same words, spoken in the same tone, by another voice the night before on the veranda. "I'm glad, Joe, because I seemed all wrong to myself. Uncle Jonas died last night, and I haven't been able to get sorry. Perhaps it's because I've been so frightened about you, but I think not, for I wasn't sorry even before Colonel Filcroft told me about you."

"Jonas Tabor dead!" said Joe. "Why, I saw him on the street yesterday!"

"Yes, and I saw him just before I came out on the porch where you were. He was there in the hall. He and Judge Pike had been having a long talk. They'd been in some speculations together, and it had all turned out well. It's very strange, but they say now that Uncle Jonas' heart was weak—he was an old man, you know, almost eighty—and he'd been very anxious about his money. The judge had persuaded him to risk it, and the shock of finding that he'd made a great deal suddenly!"

"I've heard he'd had that same shock before," said Joe, "when he sold out to your father."

"Yes, but this was different, grandfather says. He told me it was in one of those big risky businesses that Judge Pike likes to go into. And last night it was all finished, the strain was over, and Uncle Jonas started home. His house is only a little way from the Pikes', you know, but he dropped down in the snow at his own gate, and some people who were going by saw him fall. He was dead before grandfather got there."

She put her hand on the boy's arm, and he let it remain there. "Ariel" still sought his with a tremulous appeal.

"God bless you, Ariel!" he said. "It's going to be a great thing for you."

"Yes—yes; it is." The tears came suddenly to her eyes. "I was foolish last night, but there had been such a long time of wanting things, and now—now grandfather and I can go!"

"You're going, too?" Joe chuckled. "It's heartless, I suppose, but I've settled it. We're going!"

"I know," he cried. "You've told me a thousand times what he's said ten times a thousand. You're going to Paris."

"Paris! Yes; that's it. To Paris, where he can see at last how the great ones have painted—where the others can show him! To Paris, where we can study together, where he can learn how to put the pictures he sees upon canvas, and where I!"

"Go on," Joe encouraged her. "I want to hear you say it. You don't mean that you're going to study painting. You mean that you're going to learn how to make such fellows as Eugene ask you to dance. Go ahead and say it."

"Yes—to learn how to dress," she said.

Joe was silent for a moment. Then he rose and took the ragged overcoat from the back of his chair. "Where's that muffler?" he asked.

She brought it from where she had placed it to dry, behind the stove.

"Joe," she said huskily, "can't you wait till?"

"Till the estate is settled and you can coax your grandfather to?"

"No, no! But you could go with us."

"To Paris?"

"He would take you as his secretary."

"Aha!" Joe's voice rang out gayly as he rose, refreshed by the coffee, toast and warmth she had given him. "You've been story reading, Ariel, like Eugene. 'Secretary'!"

"Please, Joe!"

"Where's my tin dinner pail?" He found it himself upon the table where he had set it down. "I'm going to earn a dishonest living," he went on. "I have an engagement to take a freight at a water tank that's a friend of mine, half a mile south of the yards. Thank God, I'm going to get away from Canaan!"

"Wait, Joe!" She caught at his sleeve. "I want you to!"

He disappeared in a white whirlwind.

(To be continued.)

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